



Issue: Resident Physician Shortage Reduction Act

CAP Position: The CAP urges Congress to pass legislation to address the physician shortage. Pathologists are physicians who specialize in the diagnosis of disease. The expertise they provide drives treatment decisions that optimize outcomes for patients. Now more than ever patients and their treating physicians are relying on the expertise of pathologists, which makes addressing the physician shortage even more crucial. The CAP is projecting a substantially lower supply of trained pathologists in the short and long-term and congressional action needs to be taken in order to mitigate this.

Background:

The United States is facing a shortage of up to 124,000 physicians by 2034, exacerbated by an aging physician population, rising rates of physician burnout, and early retirement due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Upon graduation from medical school, resident physicians typically spend four or more years in Graduate Medical Education (GME) training at teaching hospitals and their associated ambulatory (outpatient) settings. Most of the funding for these programs comes from Medicare. Medicare pays for direct GME, for the costs of educating residents, and indirect medical education to cover the generally higher costs teaching hospitals incur. Congress made a critical initial investment in the physician workforce by providing 1,000 new Medicare-supported GME positions in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021, the first increase of its kind in nearly twenty-five years. We appreciate this investment, as well as the 200 Medicare-supported GME positions that were provided in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023. However, we recognize that these were only a down payment for a much larger need.

The demand for trained pathologists continues to far exceed the supply provided by the number of existing residency positions. Data from the CAP's 2021 Practice Leader Survey is suggestive of a nationwide demand of 1,000-1,200 pathologists to fill open positions in the United States in recent years, and these numbers are substantially lower than the demand that is being reported for 2022. In contrast, over the last decade or so, there have been approximately 620 pathologist residency positions available each year. However, of those pathologists that complete residency, not all go on to practice full time due to a variety of reasons, including some opting to pursue research or go into industry rather than clinical practice, and others being international medical graduates (IMGs) that rely on J-1 visas. In 2022, 33.3% of first year pathology resident slots were non-U.S. IMGs.¹

To meet the increased demand for pathologists and other physicians, there must be a larger investment in training. For these reasons, the CAP supports the Resident Physician Shortage Reduction Act, introduced by Senators Menendez (D-NJ), Boozman (R-AR), and Majority Leader Schumer (D-NY), and Representatives Sewell (D-AL) and Fitzpatrick (R-PA). This bill would provide 14,000 new Medicare-supported GME positions over seven years, and while these 14,000 positions would still not be enough to remedy the physician shortage, they are a critical step in the right direction. These positions would be targeted at hospitals with diverse needs, rural teaching hospitals, hospitals currently training over their Medicare caps, hospitals in states with new medical schools, and hospitals serving patients in health professional shortage areas. The legislation would also take steps to improve physician workforce diversity by commissioning a report to specifically look at ways to create a more diverse clinical workforce.

In short, the CAP asks that you cosponsor the Resident Physician Shortage Reduction Act when it is introduced in the House or Senate. For More Information: Contact Hannah Burriss, Assistant Director of Legislation and Political Action at (202) 354-7139 or by email at hburriss@cap.org.

¹ National Resident Matching Program, Results and Data: 2022 Main Residency Match®. National Resident Matching Program, Washington, DC. 2022. <https://www.nrmp.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/2022-Main-Match-Results-and-Data-Final-Revised.pdf>